

TWO BRAINIAC ODDBALLS AND ONE MEAN BASTARD, PAGE 14

THE INDYPENDENT

Issue #154, July 28 - September 7, 2010
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

Reigniting the Imagination

ARUN GUPTA, PAGE 12



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CURSE OF THE
BLACK GOLD,
p8-9

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THE INDYPENDENT, INC.
666 BROADWAY, SUITE 500
NEW YORK, NY 10012

PHONE: 212-904-1282

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:
Ellen Davidson, Anna Gold, John Tarleton

GENERAL MANAGER:
Arun Gupta

EDITOR/COORDINATOR:
Elizabeth Henderson

CULTURE EDITOR:
Kate Perkins

ILLUSTRATIONS COORDINATOR:
Frank Reynoso

DESIGNERS:
Ryan Dunsmuir, Anna Gold

GENERAL INQUIRIES:
contact@indypendent.org

SUBMISSIONS AND NEWS TIPS:
submissions@indypendent.org

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DONATIONS:
indypendent.org/donate

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION:
ads@indypendent.org

READER COMMENTS:
letters@indypendent.org

VOLUNTEER:
volunteer@indypendent.org
IndyKids: indykids@indymedia.org

The Indypendent is a New York-based free newspaper published 16 times a year on Wednesdays to our print and online readership of more than 200,000. It is produced by a network of volunteers who report, write, edit, draw, design, take photos, distribute, fundraise and provide website management. Since 2000, more than 650 journalists, artists and media activists have participated in this project. Winner of more than 50 New York Community Media Alliance awards. *The Indypendent* is funded by subscriptions, reader donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of people locally and globally. *The Indypendent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

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VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS:

Sam Alcott, Steven Arnerich, Mark Bailey, Bennett Baumer, Ellen Davidson, Dondi J, Daniel Fishel, Seth Fisher, Leo Garcia, Elizabeth Gyor, Mary Annaise Heglar, Andrew Hinderaker, Helen Hyppolite, Irina Ivanova, Alice Joyce, Alex Kane, Sakura Kelley, Lisa Lin, Thomas Marczewski, Jaisal Noor, Matthew Scott Smith, John Tarleton, Kevin Wallace, Mary Williams, Steven Wishnia and Amy Wolf.

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community calendar

PLEASE SEND EVENT ANNOUNCEMENTS TO INDYEVENTS@GMAIL.COM.

SAT JULY 31 – SUN SEPT 12

Various times/locations • Free
PERFORMANCE: SUMMER STREET THEATER TOUR: *GONE FISSION*. Join Theater for the New City's award-winning street theater cast for their annual tour throughout the five boroughs. This year's performance of *Gone Fission* features trap doors, giant puppets, smoke machines, masks and original choreography.
212-254-1109
theaterforthenewcity.net/street.htm

MON AUG 2 – WED AUG 4

All day • Free
EXHIBIT: MODERN DAY SLAVERY MUSEUM TOUR. The Florida Modern-Day Slavery Museum will visit historic landmarks, places of worship and community centers to explore connections between past and present slavery, and offer solutions to this human rights crisis.
julia@ciw-online.org • ciw-online.org/museum/summer2010.html

THU AUG 5

7pm • \$25 and up
FUNDRAISER: GET ON BOARD AND HELP SEND A BOAT TO GAZA. U.S. to Gaza is hosting a benefit to raise money for *The Audacity of Hope*, a U.S. boat scheduled to join the next freedom flotilla as part of the international effort to break the blockade of Gaza. Come enjoy Middle Eastern food, music and special guests including Chris Hedges and Ann Wright. Make reservations at nyboatevent@gmail.com. The Marco Polo Marina, 23rd St & FDR Dr
ustogaza@gmail.com
ustogaza.org

6pm • Free
RECEPTION: URBAN ACTIVISM IN THE LES. Join the Lower East Side Ecology Center and AMPLIFY! for an exhibition documenting urban activism initiatives in NYC. AMPLIFY! is a project of The New School working to make urban activism easier and more enjoyable through design.
Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St
212-477-4022 • lesecologycenter.org

FRI AUG 6

7pm–12am • \$10
PARTY: OLDIES BUT GOODIES. Come enjoy good food and great music. Proceeds to benefit Picture the Homeless (PTH).
Picture the Homeless
2427 Morris Ave, Bronx
646-314-6423 • picturethehomeless.org

SAT AUG 7

1:30pm • Free
DEMONSTRATION: HIROSHIMA DAY COMMEMORATION. Join a silent march to call for the termination of nuclear weapons worldwide. There will be a peace vigil at the end of the march. Participants are encouraged to wear dark clothing.
Assemble on 4th Ave
btwn 96th and 97th St, Bklyn
718-680-2981 • infaithpeace.com

3pm • Free
RUN/WALK: RUNNING DOWN THE WALLS 2010. The NYC Anarchist Black Cross will host a 5k run/walk/jog in solidarity with the political prisoners and prisoners of war held in the United States. Picnic to follow the walk at 5pm.
Brooklyn Public Library
10 Grand Army Plaza, Bklyn
nycabc@riseup.net • abcf.net

WED AUG 11

7pm • \$10
FILM SCREENING: *DIRT*. Nancy Savoca's riveting drama tells the story of undocumented immigrants living a harsh existence in contemporary Manhattan. Talk back with the director to follow.
Revolution Books, 146 W 26th St
212-691-3345 • revolutionbooksnyc.org

WED AUG 18

7pm • Free
READING: PAUL STREET. Come listen to Paul Street speak about his new book, *The Empire's New Clothes*. A sequel to Street's *Barack Obama and the Future of American Politics*, this book compares Obama's current record on domestic and foreign politics against his original agenda for change.
Bluestockings Books, 172 Allen St
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

reader comments

Post your own comments online at the end of each article at indypendent.org or email letters@indypendent.org.

BP DISASTER

Response to “*The Gulf Disaster: No End in Sight*,” June 2:

Is this mess not important enough for our leaders along with our president to give it top priority? What is wrong with the people in Washington, D.C.? The people that this is hurting need nationwide support to put all the pressure on our leaders to fix this mess! This is so bad, it makes no sense what so ever. Our president goes about his every day schedule as all others like this is nothing.
—MARK PRIMUS

FUTURE OF PUBLIC HOUSING

Response to “*Out on the Streets: Understanding the Section 8 Housing Crisis*,” June 2:

It's a shame that no system is in place. The tough economic time is not an excuse to ignore the most needy in our city. If not addressed, it can deeply affect the quality of life for all New Yorkers.

— KATHY

PEACE & VICTIMHOOD

Responses to “*The Victim That Is Israel*,” June 2:

I am far from being a Zionist; however if we accept the idea that Israel has a right to peacefully exist, then it is up to Hamas and the other Arabs to stop attacking it, threatening to attack it, sending terrorists to attack it, etc etc etc. Perhaps if the Israelis had no discernible security concerns, they would be able to do what they say they want to do; i.e., live in peace. The Arab/Muslim world, however, does not seem to want to live in peace, and the so-called “moderate” Muslims seem to be out voiced by the lunatic fringe. Where are the Islamic peace activists?

— LARRY

Thank you, Mr. Gupta, for your careful, patient, persistent documentation of the absurd falsifications and fascist ideological propaganda vomited into the abyss (i.e. the ‘public mind’) by most of the mainstream corporate capitalist ‘news’ sources. Please

AUGUST

WED AUG 4 – TUE AUG 10

WORKSHOP: PLAYBACK THEATER. Led by Susan Metz. Six-day workshop focuses on the Playback techniques or rituals, including time for self-reflection, feedback and discussion of theory and history of the world movement.
Tuition: \$200

THU AUG 5 • 7:30PM

DISCUSSION: A NEW NOTION: TWO WORKS BY C.L.R. JAMES. Professor Noel Ignatiev will discuss the role C.L.R. James played in the independence movement in the West Indies and in the black and working-class movements in both Britain and the United States.
Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

FRI AUG 20- SUN AUG 22

SAVE THE DATE: MARXIST INTENSIVE.

TUE SEPT 14 • 7:30PM

DISCUSSION: GLOBAL CAPITALISM. First of four monthly meetings exploring current major economic events as well as longer-term economic trends shaping politics and society in the United States and abroad. Led by Richard D. Wolff. Additional sessions on will be held on Oct. 12, Nov. 9 and Dec. 7.
Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

FOR INFORMATION AND TICKET RESERVATIONS

brechtforum.org
or 212-242-4201

UPCOMING EVENTS

THE BRECHT FORUM

BUILDING A MOVEMENT THAT MOVES

451 West Street (btw Bank and Bethune)

TUE AUG 24

4-7pm • Free
INFORMATION SESSION: VOTING MACHINES. Try out the city's new voting system before the September primaries in this hands-on demonstration and information session hosted by the NYC League.
NYC League Office, 4 W 43rd Street
212-725-3541 • office@lwvny.org

SAT AUG 28

7:30-10:30pm • Free
DANCE: AUGUST BARN DANCE. Join the

Time Squares, the largest LGBT square dance group in the country, and learn modern western square dancing. You don't need a partner, just come and make friends and dance.
The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center
208 W 13th St
212-620-7310 • gaycenter.org

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keep up the courageous work.

— ASTUDILLO



BY MICHAEL STEVEN SMITH

I was in the courtroom with my wife Debby for Lynne Stewart's re-sentencing on July 15 when Judge John Koetl buried her alive. He read his decision out loud to a courtroom packed with supporters. It was well crafted. Bulletproof on appeal.

He cited the unprecedented 400 letters he had received from Lynne's supporters, all of which he said he read. He noted Lynne's three decades of service to the poor and the outcast. He stressed that she is a 70-year-old breast cancer survivor

it by his superiors, the judges on the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. Located in downtown Manhattan, this court is considered the second-highest court next to the Supreme Court because it presides over the financial center of the empire.

This court makes policy and Lynne Stewart was to be made an example of in "the war on terrorism" just as a half a century before, in the same court, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were condemned to death in the war against communism and found guilty of "stealing the secret" of the atomic bomb, when there was no secret, it

the world is no longer led by communists but by fundamentalist Muslims.

Lynne Stewart represented one of them, Sheik Abdel Rahman, who was a leading opponent to the U.S.-sponsored Mubarak dictatorship in Egypt. In 1993, at the behest of the Egyptian government, Sheik Rahman was indicted and later convicted of the crime of "sedition" for suggesting to a government informant that rather than blow up New York City landmarks he choose "a military target." In June of 2000, Lynne released a statement by the Sheik to the press, announcing his withdrawal of support for a ceasefire between his group and the Egyptian government. This violated a Special Administrative Measure (SAMs) that Lynne had agreed to with the U.S. Government. She wasn't supposed to be a medium for communication between her client and the outside world. She should have challenged the constitutionality of the SAMs, she now realizes, and not just have violated them.

The government waited until after 9/11 to prosecute her, making an example out of her to intimidate other lawyers. Attorney General John Ashcroft publicized Lynne's indictment on *The Late Show with David Letterman* in April 2002. The crime? A novel one. Conspiracy to provide material aid to a terrorist organization. What was the material aid? Her client. With the fear the government generated and the scare they put into her jury, Lynne never had a chance. In 2006 she was convicted and sentenced. The maximum was 30 years, but thanks to the superb legal work of National Lawyers Guild attorneys Elizabeth Fink and Sarah Kunstler and the outpour of public support, Judge Koetl gave her 28 months. The government appealed the sentence. The selective prosecution of Lynne Stewart was accomplished.

Judge John Walker, George W. Bush's first cousin, sits on the appeals court. His family made its fortune selling munitions during WWI. He wrote that the 28 months was "shockingly low." Judge Koetl was given his orders. On the same evidence he put a 70-year-old grandmother on chemotherapy away for 10 years. This is much more than meanness. It is ideology.

Michael Steven Smith is the co-host of the WBAI radio show Law and Disorder and sits on the board of the Center for Constitutional Rights.

BURIED ALIVE



PHOTO: ROBERT BRUCE LIVINGSTON

with high blood pressure and other serious health problems. And then he laid it on her: 120 months.

Ten years. He had given her a death sentence everyone in the courtroom thought: She'll never get out. He more than quadrupled the 28-month sentence he had originally pronounced. She had told him that 28 months was a horizon, that she had hope. But no more. Lynne's granddaughter gasped, and then started sobbing. She kept crying even as Judge Koetl kept reading. And reading. The sentence was cruel. How to understand it?

Lynne's lawyer Jill Shellow asked the Judge why. He was candid. He was told to do

was only a matter of technology. The sentencing Judge Kaufman knew they would leave behind two orphan children, Robert and Michael, ages six and three.

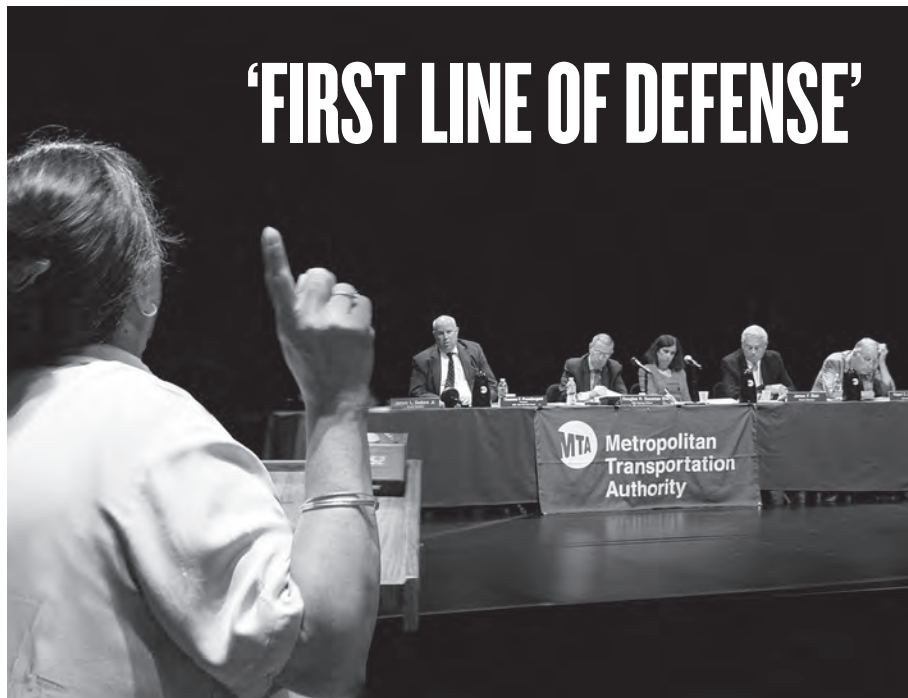
In 1947 George Kennan, the ideological father of the Cold War, wrote that the United States had 6 percent of the world's population and 50 percent of its wealth. The challenge for the empire was to keep it. Anti-communism served as political cover for the U.S. ruling classes. But communism ceased to exist after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. A new cover was constructed following the September 11 attacks: "The War on Terror." Nationalist opposition to U.S. policy in many parts of

More than 100 transit workers and straphangers attended the Metropolitan Transit Authority's public hearing at Hostos Community College in the Bronx on July 14. Many attendees expressed concerns that the cuts — which include closing or reducing the hours of 42 subway booths and eliminating 44 station agent positions — would make train stations unsafe.

"You guys are cutting the first line of defense for safety," said Eric Paralles, a former transit worker and Bronx resident.

These reductions were originally proposed in 2009, but efforts by the Transit Workers Union Local 100 to block the layoffs have forced the MTA to hold public hearings in each of the five boroughs.

—MARY ANNAÏSE HEGLAR
PHOTO: SAKURA KELLEY



Pro-Tenant Bills Languish in State Senate

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

Thirteen housing activists were arrested July 12 in a sit-in protesting New York State Senate Democrats' failure to pass pro-tenant legislation.

As about 200 demonstrators chanted, "Housing is a right! Fight, fight, fight!," the 13 activists blocked the entrance to 250 Broadway, where both the Senate and Assembly leadership have offices. They were charged with disorderly conduct and released with desk appearance tickets a few hours later.

"We are not here to ask. We are here to demand," Leandra Reaquina of Make the Road New York told the rally before she sat down. Other speakers urged pro-tenant Democrats to hold up the state budget until the Senate repeals the law letting landlords deregulate vacant apartments if they can charge more than \$2,000 a month.

The Assembly has passed bills that would repeal vacancy decontrol, extend rent-stabilization protections to tenants whose landlords leave or have already left the Mitchell-Lama or project-based Section 8 subsidy programs, reduce the rent increases allowed for vacant or renovated apartments, and protect against abuses such as mass owner-occupancy evictions. In the State Senate, though, those bills have been tied up by the Republican minority and a few pro-landlord Democrats, and the Democratic leadership has been reluctant to push them.

For years, New York Democrats blamed the weakening of rent controls and tenant protections on the Senate's Republican majority. They promised that when they gained control of the Legislature's upper house, they would change things. Tenant and housing groups sent hundreds of volunteers out to campaign for Democrats in 2008. When the Democrats won a 32-30 majority that November, the activists had a dozen bills ready.

Last year, however, Senator Pedro Espada (D-Bronx) blocked the repeal of vacancy decontrol by briefly switching to the Republicans. Espada, along with Craig Johnson (D-Nassau) and Carl Kruger (D-Brooklyn), is "widely known to be beholden to landlord lobbyists," says Mario Mazzoni of the Metropolitan Council on Housing, one of the 13 arrested. These three, along with Jeffrey Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester), have worked behind the scenes to prevent pro-tenant legislation from reaching the Senate floor.

"The question is, why is the Democratic leadership letting a small handful of its corrupt members call the shots?" Michael McKee of Housing Here and Now, who was also arrested, told *Tenant/Inquilino*, Met Council's monthly newspaper. Espada and Kruger are both under investigation for alleged corruption.

According to Mazzoni, the Senate leadership wants to hold the pro-tenant bills until next year, hoping the November elections will give them a bigger majority. The tenant movement rejects that idea, he says. "Who put Democrats in the majority — us or the landlords? How much patience are tenants supposed to have?"

Another possibility is that the leadership doesn't want to alienate real estate, which is, along with Wall Street, the largest source of campaign money in New York. According to a New York Public Interest Research Group study commissioned by *The New York Times* in 2008, major real-estate interests gave State Senate Democrats more than \$750,000 for that year's election, hoping to head off pro-tenant legislation.

Much of that money went through Jeffrey Klein, who heads the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee. He received more than \$240,000 in real-estate contributions for his 2008 campaign, almost a third of his take in the second half of the year, the *Daily News* reported in 2009.



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CUNY

AT A CROSSROADS

Gov's Bid to Overhaul Tuition Ties Up Albany

By JOHN TARLETON
 AND SAKURA KELLEY

Students at New York's public universities could face steady tuition increases for years to come depending on the outcome of a high-stakes budget battle in Albany.

State legislators have closed most of this year's projected \$9 billion deficit but Gov. David Paterson continues to insist that he will not sign off on a budget deal unless the Legislature agrees to a non-budget measure that would dramatically alter how tuition is set at the City University of New York (CUNY) and State University of New York (SUNY) systems.

Under the Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act (PHEEIA) originally proposed by Gov. Paterson, control over future tuition increases would shift from the State Legislature to the Boards of Trustees at CUNY and SUNY. The trustees would be allowed to hike tuition annually by as much as two and a half times a rolling five-year average inflation rate for higher education, or about 9 percent per year. At that rate, annual tuition for a full-time CUNY senior college student could increase from the current level of \$4,600 per year to more than \$7,000 per year by 2015 and almost \$11,000 per year within a decade. Tuition at SUNY senior colleges, which is currently \$4,970 per year, would also skyrocket.

The Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act would also enable CUNY and SUNY to establish higher tuitions for certain academic majors such as engineering and some of the hard sciences, which have a greater cost structure. The CUNY and SUNY systems have a combined enrollment of more than 720,000, including 260,000 CUNY students enrolled at 23 institutions throughout the five boroughs, including 11 senior colleges and six community colleges.

"The one immediate effect of this measure, if not its intent, would be to segregate academic fields by race and class," said Barbara Bowen, president of the Professional Staff Congress, the union that represents CUNY's faculty and professional staff. "Richer students would be free to select any academic field while poorer students would be channeled into less expensive majors."

The chancellors of CUNY and SUNY both back PHEEIA, saying it would help revitalize public higher education in New York by providing a steady, guaranteed source of revenue that would no longer be subject to the whims of elected officials. This, they add, would then make it easier to solicit large donations from private sources. According to *The New York Times*, one potential donor, hedge fund billionaire James Simons, has indicated he would give as much as \$150 million to SUNY-Stony Brook, but only if some version of PHEEIA is approved.

A DIVIDED LEGISLATURE

The State Assembly strongly opposes PHEEIA. Meanwhile, the State Senate, which the Democrats control by a one-vote margin, has been deadlocked for weeks by the Republican minority, which routinely votes against any version of the budget, and senators William Stachowski (D-Buffalo) and Brian Foley (D-Long Island) who have refused to allow the final passage of the state budget until the Legislature signs onto PHEEIA.

The Senate leadership recently crafted another version of PHEEIA, which Paterson has signaled he is in broad agreement with. It would allow the State University's four premiere schools in Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo and Stony Brook to increase tuition by as much 7 percent per year while capping annual tuition increases to 4 percent at other SUNY schools. Passage of a modified PHEEIA could set the stage for a future push to allow CUNY's top schools — City College, Brooklyn College, Queens College, Hunter College and Baruch College — to also charge differential tuition.

Assemblywoman Deborah Glick (D-Manhattan), Chair of the Assembly's Higher Education Committee, told *The Independent* that the Senate's revised version of PHEEIA did not have the Assembly's support. Glick, a CUNY graduate, expressed concern that yearly increases in tuition would not be matched by extra funding for the state's Tuition Assistance Program and would leave poor students without enough aid to pay for the new tuition. She also said that there was no guarantee that the additional revenues generated through tuition increases would not be offset by future reductions in state funding for CUNY and SUNY.

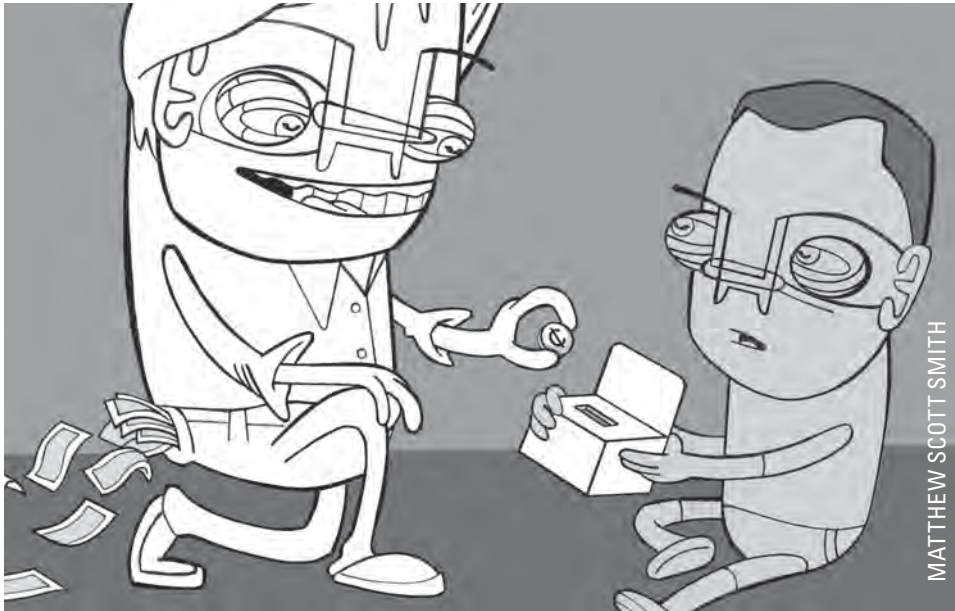
"We need to maintain the public [higher education] system as an affordable and accessible system," Glick said.

To contact your State Senator or Assembly Member about the Public Higher Education Empowerment Initiative Act, visit union-voice.org/campaign/empower_3.



KEVIN WALLACE

Haiti's Future on Hold



MATTHEW SCOTT SMITH

BY ISABEL MACDONALD

After the Jan. 12 earthquake in Haiti, Western leaders announced bold plans for building a “New Haiti.” The reconstruction, they emphasized, would be “Haitian-led,” based firmly on the principle of respect for “Haitian sovereignty” and carried out through “full and continued participation” by Haitians, “consistent with the vision of the Haitian people and government.” At the March 31 International Donors Conference, Towards a New Future for Haiti, held at the U.N. headquarters in New York, nearly \$10 billion was pledged for Haiti’s recovery. Nicholas Sarkozy — the first French president to visit Haiti since it

won its independence from French colonial rule more than 200 years ago — proclaimed during his February 2010 trip to Port-au-Prince, “International aid must be massive and be there for the long term.”

“Now is the time to step up our investment in Haiti,” U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton reiterated in April at a meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank. Yet more than six months after the earthquake, the plan for a “New Future for Haiti” (a “Haitian-led” effort that is curiously being funded under World Bank oversight, through a commission whose 20 voting board members include only seven Haitians) seems remote as indicated by the accounting of “humanitarian efforts” in Haiti so far.

Amount pledged over next two years at April U.N. Donor Conference: **\$5.4 billion**

Percent of that amount delivered: **About 10**

Share of amount delivered in the form of debt relief: **At least 2/3**

Number of countries, as of June, that have honored their aid pledges: **1**

Amount of pledged U.S. bilateral search and rescue assistance to Haiti that was delivered in the wake of the earthquake: **\$0**

Value of the no-bid contract the U.S. government awarded the private prison group GEO in the month after the earthquake: **\$260,589**

Ratio of U.S. pledges for Haiti’s reconstruction to Venezuelan pledges: **1:2**

Value of aid the French government has promised Haiti through pledged contributions to U.N. agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross: **\$180 million**

Amount of this aid that has been delivered: **\$0**

Amount U.S. relief groups have raised in donations: **\$1.3 billion**

Amount of donations that went to American Red Cross and Catholic Relief Services: **\$608.8 million**

Amount spent so far by those two organizations: **\$179.1 million**

Cost of the French secretary of state for overseas

development’s travel via private jet to a conference on aid for Haiti: **\$143,000**

Amount spent per day on “floating hotel” housing U.N. peacekeepers in Haiti: **\$72,500**

Estimated number of Haitian’s vulnerable to malnutrition: **2 million**

Estimated percent of the 20 million cubic meters of rubble not yet removed: **98**

Estimated number of Haitians who remain homeless after the earthquake: **1,500,000**

Number of Haitians without even tents or tarps for shelter: **232,130**

Percent of tents and tarps distributed that “might” need to be replaced as of June 8: **36**

Percent of “transitional shelters” that have been built so far: **4.5**

Haiti’s global ranking in terms of the number of NGOs operating in the nation, on a per-capita-basis: **#1**

Ratio of Haitian-produced rice to U.S.-imported rice consumed in Haiti in 1985: **22:1**

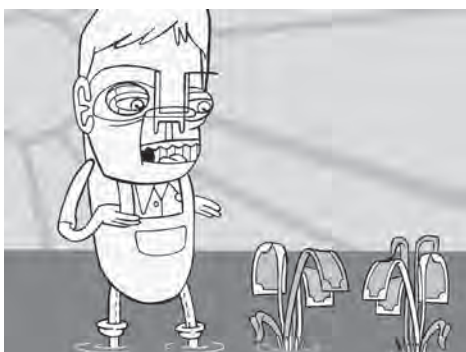
Ratio of Haitian to U.S.-produced rice consumed in Haiti in 2000, five years after an IMF structural adjustment program went into effect reducing rice import tariffs: **1:2**

Value of USAID’s current contract to improve Haitian agriculture with Chemonics, a former subsidiary of the parent company of American Rice Inc., the corporation that is considered to have most benefited from the demise of Haitian rice production: **\$126,000,000**

Value of additional contracts with Chemonics since the earthquake: **\$73,000,000**

Value of total French humanitarian assistance to Haiti since the earthquake: **\$36 million**

Estimated value today of the compensation Haiti paid France for lost French slave trade profits after Haiti, a former French slave colony, won independence: **\$40 billion**



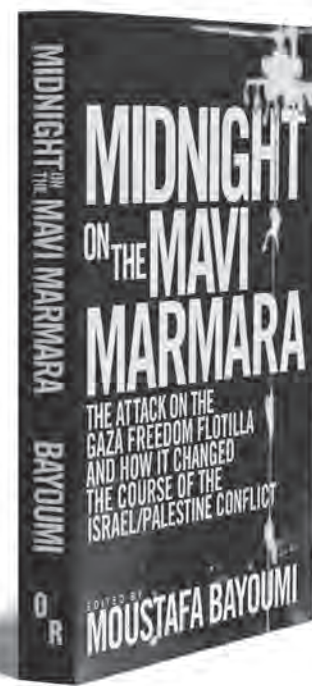
MATTHEW SCOTT SMITH

Additional research and reporting by Jake Johnston.

MIDNIGHT ON THE MAVI MARMARA

The Attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla and How It Changed the Course of the Israel/Palestine Conflict

Edited by Moustafa Bayoumi



On the night of May 31st 2010, Israeli commandos intercepted the boats of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla as they attempted to bring humanitarian relief to the Palestinians of Gaza. Within minutes nine peace activists were dead, shot by the Israelis. Outrage at Israel’s action soon echoed around the world. Even its traditional allies in the United States expressed dismay at what Israel had done.

Mixing riveting first-hand testimony with hard-headed analysis, a range of activists, journalists, and scholars piece together the events of that May night, examining their meanings for Israel’s three-year-long blockade of Gaza and the decades-long Israel/Palestine conflict.

Contributors include: Ali Abunimah, Omar Barghouti, Max Blumenthal, Noam Chomsky, Juan Cole, Norman Finkelstein, Glenn Greenwald, Amira Hass, Adam Horowitz, Rashid Khalidi, Stephen Kinzer, Iara Lee, Henning Mankell, Gideon Levy, Mike Marqusee, Ilan Pappé, Sara Roy, Adam Shapiro, Raja Shehadeh, Ahdaf Soueif, Alice Walker, Stephen M. Walt, and Philip Weiss.

Book releases July 28th 2010. 304 pages.

Paperback \$16. E-book \$10. Paperback and E-book together \$20.

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8am, Mon-Fri

Brooklyn BCAT Channel 56/69
9am, Mon-Fri

Bronxnet Channel 67
9am, Tues & Thurs

SATELLITE TV
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DISH Network Channel 9415
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Link TV
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11am, 6pm, Mon-Fri

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Dispersing Disaster in the Gulf

BY DAHR JAMAIL
PHOTOS BY ERIKA BLUMENFELD

In mid-July we visited the town of Barataria, located about an hour's drive south of New Orleans. The community of fishermen is swimming in oil. Within minutes of arriving, our eyes start to burn and we begin to feel dizzy from airborne chemicals from the oil and dispersant.

Like most of the rest of the Louisiana estuary, the further south one drives the more one enters a culture that revolves around the water. Moss-laden oak trees, some more than four feet in diameter, line the road in places before giving way to canals, bayous and swamps that lap against the pavement.

We went to Barataria to meet with Tracy Kuhns, the executive director of Louisiana Bayoukeeper, a group that works with local communities to try to sustainably manage the bayous. Tracy, who is also a member of the Louisiana Shrimp Association, immediately starts talking about the chemical dispersants BP is spraying on the oil.

Tracy mentions Corexit 9500 and Corexit 9527, both of which BP is using (more than 1.8 million gallons and counting) to disperse crude oil on the surface of the Gulf of Mexico and 5,000 feet underwater where the volcano of oil from the ruptured wellhead gushes poison into the Gulf.

"Just days ago Barataria Bay was full of oil," Tracy says while sweeping her arm toward the large — now toxic — bay to the south. "Then they hit it with dispersants and the oil goes to the bottom. But then during the day, it heats up and the oil bubbles up to the surface."

Tracy, like many other shrimpers, calls this the "lava lamp" effect.

"The oil, after they hit it with dispersants, moves around beneath the surface and they can't track it," she continues, "They are using dispersants so they can minimize their liability." Tracy tells us of the 44 exemptions the government has issued to BP for use of dispersant.

She shows us video of whitish foam lining the marshes and an emulsified paste floating on water. As we talk, Tracy repeatedly complains of a persistent headache, nausea and often feeling "out of it."

The dispersants can be absorbed by breathing or ingesting them, and skin and eye con-

tact. Exposure can cause a litany of harsh effects including headaches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pains, dizziness, difficulty breathing, neurotoxicity, and respiratory system, genetic and cardiovascular damage.

Barely two hours after our arrival I pull Erika aside and tell her my eyes are burning and I feel dizzy. "So are mine, and so do I," she says. "And my skin burns. Look at this," turning her head to show a light-red rash on her cheek. Pressure pulses against my forehead. I'm shocked by how quickly both of us are exhibiting symptoms of chemical exposure.

Tracy says most fishermen are now working for BP laying out boom. "If you're not doing this clean-up work, you're not working," she says, "They feel like they are helping by doing clean-up work, and they can't stand to just sit here and not do something to help. They feel helpless sitting at home, and that's when the depression, suicide and drinking kick in."

As we continue to talk, our eyes burn even more, and the pulsing headache and dizziness increase. On this trip every shrimper we talk to tells us they are suffering from some or even most of the symptoms of exposure.

"Bad air moves in off the bay any time the wind is from the south or southeast," Tracy adds. "And we're trying to get BP to have air monitors on the boats of the fishermen who are helping clean up, but they won't do it."

Tracy's passion for the Gulf and its marine ecosystems is evident. "Ninety percent of the species in the Gulf of Mexico spend some part of their lives in the Louisiana estuaries," she says. "BP is killing our hope of getting these restocked for the future."

Her concerns mirror those of Paul Orr. Just a few days ago, in Baton Rouge, we visited the offices of the Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper, which is focused on keeping the lower Mississippi River pollution-free.

"This is the second most important delta in the Western Hemisphere, and one of the most important deltas on the planet," Paul says. "We just have no idea what this amount of oil in this close proximity to the delta could do. The decision was made to use the dispersants intensively to sink the oil — the rationale to minimize shore impacts at all costs. But now it seems like the real reason they've been doing that is to get the oil to disappear because if it was



Dead blue crabs float in the Louisiana bayous near the town of Barataria. The crabs were probably killed by a combination of chemical dispersants and crude oil. PHOTO: ERIKA BLUMENFELD

staying on the surface, at least you could collect it, even if it starts impacting the shore in some way. But now we have an unknown millions of barrels of oil floating around in the water column and sticking to the sea floor. We may not ever know some of the long-term damages."

Working with eco-activists and fisherfolk in all five Gulf states, Tracy says the BP catastrophe has allowed these groups to overcome their usual differences. "This transcends all other issues because everyone must breathe this air. We are all connected by this water. And now we're all connected by BP's oil. We all know what's going on. What planet do they live on in Washington, D.C.? Not this one. They need to come here and breathe this shit every day, and swim in this soup and tell us it's just fine. All the kids around here have rashes, asthma problems, ear infections and the majority of our fishermen are out there working in this stuff 24-7 because it's now the only job in town, and they're all getting sick."

Tracy introduces us to Gene Hickman, a commercial fisherman, who shows us a nighttime video he shot recently of dozens of crabs crawling out of the canal onto his bulkhead. I watch horrified. Gene says, "It's not natural for crabs to come out of the water like this. They never want to come out of the water if

they can help it. They are trying to escape."

Tracy chimes in. "We are seeing this all over the Gulf now — dolphins, fish, running from the dispersant and oil because they can't breathe. Marine life knows to run out of the way, but we don't."

The day after Gene filmed the crabs fleeing the water, residents near Lake Pontchartrain reported finding thousands of dead fish and crabs in the canals near their homes. We drive over to Gene and his wife Vicky's mobile home after they inform us of dead crabs and fish floating in sheen-covered water by their boat. Gene walks over to his boat in a nearby bayou. Dead crabs bob in oily water.

Gene looks out to the water, to nearby Bayou Rigolettes, and holds back tears as he says, "I smell oil all the time. It's like it's stuck in my nose."

"You know why all this hits so close to home? See those crab traps? I guess those are relics now," Gene says. "I can't fish now, and probably won't ever be able to again, so where does this leave me? I feel like that old Indian from that old commercial who looks out at all the garbage and pollution and sees his whole world polluted."

To help support Dahr Jamail's and Erika Blumenfeld's reporting from the Gulf Coast, visit dahrjamailliraq.com/donate.



Fifty miles off the coast of Louisiana, a rig above the Macondo well, which is the site where the Deepwater Horizon exploded April 20, flares methane gas. PHOTO: ERIKA BLUMENFELD

One of the largest oil producers in the world, Nigeria exports 1.1 million barrels of petroleum a day to the United States. The continuing BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico has refocused attention on the vast Niger Delta, home to thousands of oil and gas installations and an array of militant groups waging armed struggle against Western oil companies, a kleptocratic state and ruthless military forces. More than 5,000 miles from U.S. shores, the equivalent of an Exxon Valdez's worth of oil has reportedly poured into the lush delta every year for the last 50 years.

The following material is from *Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta*. Featuring images by world-renowned photojournalist Ed Kashi and text by University of California at Berkeley Professor Michael Watts, this book traces the history of forces involved in oil extraction and the resulting environmental degradation and community conflicts that have plagued the delta region.

Curse of the Black Gold



By MICHAEL WATTS

‘Remember your petroleum, which is being pumped out daily from your veins, and then fight for your freedom.’

—Adaka Boro

The complexity, diversity and magnificence of the Niger Delta is best appreciated from the air: a massive wedge of green, cross-cut by a bewildering maze of channels, creeks, tributaries, estuaries and islands. It is a vast sediment pile laid down over 60 million years, stretching over 28,000 square miles and protruding 150 miles into the Atlantic Ocean along the West African littoral. It is one of the world's largest deltas, comparable in grandeur and scale to the Mississippi, the Ganges and the Mekong.

Occupying 12 percent of Nigeria's territory, the delta is home to an estimated 28 million people, overwhelmingly poor. The core states — Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta and Akwa Ibom — account for half of the regional population and for more

than three-quarters of onshore oil production. Cities like Warri, Port Harcourt, Sapele and Ughelli have developed on islands of drier terrain at the heads of navigable estuaries, but in general the population is predominantly rural.

The first barrels of Nigerian crude oil destined for the world market departed from Port Harcourt harbor on Feb. 17, 1958. The oil had been discovered in the central Niger Delta in 1956 at Oloibiri, about 60 miles west of Port Harcourt. Shell-BP (as it then was) sunk 17 more wells in Oloibiri and the field yielded more than 20 million barrels of crude oil before operations ceased in the 1970s.

In the 1960s Oloibiri had a population of 10,000; it is now a wretched backwater, home to barely 1,000 souls who have no running water, no electricity, no roads and no functioning prima-

ry school; the creeks have been so heavily dredged, canalized and polluted that traditional rural livelihoods have been eviscerated.

It was in Oloibiri that Isaac Adaka Boro, an Ijaw nationalist and leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer Service — who proclaimed, “Remember your petroleum, which is being pumped out daily from your veins, and then fight for your freedom” — was born in 1938. Declaring an independent Niger Delta Republic on Feb. 24, 1966, Boro's famous “Twelve Day Revolution” was a foretaste of what was to come.

Boro's immediate successors in the struggle for self-determination and resource control were novelist Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni people. The meteoric rise of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People during a brutal moment in Nigeria's sad parade of military governments ended with a kangaroo court and the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and eight of his compatriots in November 1993.

Saro-Wiwa's legacy rests on his commitment to democratic nonviolence and his condemnation of the “slick alliance” of Big Government and Big Oil. Yet as he had predicted, and feared, the nonviolent struggle could and would turn violent in the face of business-as-usual politics.

The pipe-smoking writer equipped with the power of the pen has now been replaced by the figure of the masked militant armed with the ubiquitous Kalashnikov, the type-writer of the illiterate. But Saro-Wiwa's gravest fears could not have anticipated the calamitous descent into violence over the last decade, culminating with the dramatic appearance of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

Beginning with a massive attack on the Opobo pipeline in December 2005, MEND insurgents claimed they were “not communists ... or revolutionaries. [We] are just extremely bitter men.” Within a year of their appearance MEND had, as they themselves predicted, shut-in over one third of Nigeria's oil output.

Ken Saro-Wiwa's desolate prediction in 1990 of a “coming war” had seemingly come to pass.



Opposite page:
In the oil town of Afiesere, local Urhobo people bake *krokpo-garri*, or tapioca, in the heat of a gas flare. Pollutants from the flares cause serious health problems, shortening the life expectancy of the Urhobo.

Left column, top to bottom:
Since launching its war in 2005, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta has shuttered one-third of Nigeria's oil production. Demanding an equitable share of oil revenues for the region's people, the rebels called off a ceasefire earlier this year and recently attacked two cargo ships near the delta.

Women of Honour, members of the Good Shepherd Anglican Church in Warri, march through the town, urging the embattled community to put violence aside and seek peace and prosperity.

A view of the Trans Amadi Slaughterhouse, the main abattoir of Port Harcourt. The animals are killed in the open, their blood spilled into the waterways below and their skins burned by the flames of old tires.

A Shell worker holds a machete during a clean-up operation of an oil spill in Oloibiri, while disgruntled locals watch. In one incident in 2004, more than 800,000 gallons of crude gushed out of an old wellhead, fouling Oloibiri.

Right column, top to bottom:
One of the thousands of animals killed every day at the Trans Amadi Slaughterhouse. As fish stocks have dwindled due to pollution from oil and over-fishing, meat is becoming more common.

The Bonny Island liquefied natural gas terminal — the largest of its kind in the delta — is owned by a consortium composed of Shell, ExxonMobil, Total of France and Agip of Italy. Displaced to make room for this facility, the village of Finima lies across the lagoon but none of the inhabitants work in the plant.

VIOLENCE IS THE HEALTH OF THE STATE

By ELISE THORBURN

If it is true, as Karl Marx once observed, that the powers that be summon all their strength and violence just before their final agony of death, then the city of Toronto — indeed, all of Canada — was dying a month ago. Regrettably, I have my doubts as to the veracity of this claim.

An estimated \$1.2 billion was spent on security for the G8 summit held in Ontario's cottage country June 25 and the G20 summit held in Toronto June 26-27. It was enough money to purchase an arsenal sufficient for

the martial law that was implemented, though never declared as such. Sound cannons, water hoses, high-tech tear gas devices, rubber and plastic bullets, and between 16,000 and 20,000 police were imported to secure the world leaders attending the summit.

Trains were halted at Union Station, Toronto's busiest terminal. A massive detention center was erected at the Toronto Film Studios in the city's east end — a warehouse filled with cages to hold the prisoners that the police state would soon apprehend. A 16-foot-high fence surrounded the Metro Convention Centre, occupying many city blocks and halting all business within and around the area.

The Toronto Community Mobilization Network, an umbrella organization that facilitated rallies, teach-ins and events prior to the G20 summit, helped organize the "People's Summit" the weekend before the G20 and the "Themed Days of Resistance" during the official summit. Marches against G20 policies took place almost daily across the city, including marches for gender justice (since Prime Minister Stephen Harper was pushing the Maternal Health Initiative that would not include funding for or information about abortion access); aboriginal rights (since Canada has consistently refused to sign the U.N. accord on indigenous rights); and envi-

ronmental justice (since Canada is one of the world's biggest polluters and has scoffed for years at combating climate change).

Every day heralded some new movement's incorporation into the movement of movements in a way that has not been seen in Canada since the heyday of the global justice movement a decade ago. There was a palpable and inspiring energy coursing through the streets that week.

And then the arrests began.

Before the main march started on June 26, organizers were already being jailed. Early Saturday morning, two homes were raided and sleeping citizens were pulled from their beds and dragged to the detention center. In one instance, the police got the address wrong and attacked a family who had the misfortune of living in the apartment below some organizers with the Toronto Community Mobilization Network. On June 25 my friend Ken was at the Toronto bus station. Ken was to be a cook in the People's Kitchen at the Convergence Center, a space for activists to rest, read and eat during the week of actions. As he and a friend removed belongings from the bus station lockers, cops moved in. They unlawfully searched his bag, finding "weaponry" such as vinegar-soaked bandanas, first-aid equipment and a copy of *Upping the Anti*, a Toronto-based journal of political theory and activism. They immediately arrested him, charging him with "conspiracy to commit mischief." Apparently in Canada protecting oneself from tear gas and having radical politics has become illegal. He spent the weekend in detention, was released on bail, and never received his wallet, identification, camera or cell phone. His story is not unique.



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SATURDAY, AUG 21 6PM

WORLD PREMIERE

GREENING THE REVOLUTION (2010/USA)

Dir. Katie Curran

This powerful documentary investigates today's globalized, profit-centered food system—while agribusiness reaps record wealth, starving protesters cry for affordable food and peasants choose between land and death. Filmmaker Katie Curran traveled through Mexico, Cuba, India, Kenya, Zambia, Brazil, Haiti and the United States to capture intimate footage of food crisis and justice, with interviews from farmers, workers and activists, government and corporate officials, and intellectuals such as Howard Zinn, Vandana Shiva and Noam Chomsky. **Q&A after the screening.**



FRIDAY, AUG 27 6PM

NY PREMIERE

SWEET CRUDE: A FILM ABOUT THE NIGER DELTA (2009/USA/NIGERIA)

Dir. John Anderson

Like the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, this powerful documentary tells the story of the people of Nigeria's Niger Delta, who have experienced the same ordeal for years. In a small corner of the most populous country in Africa, billions of dollars of crude oil flow under the feet of a desperate people. Immense wealth and abject poverty stand in stark contrast. The environment is decimated. What if the world paid attention before it was too late? **Q&A after the screening.**

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SATURDAY, AUG 28 4PM

W.A.R. STORIES: WALTER ANTHONY RODNEY (2009/USA/GUYANA)

Dir. Clairmont Chung **Q&A after the screening.**

This film covers the life of world renowned, historian, author, and activist Dr. Walter Rodney who was assassinated in 1980, at age 38, in his native Guyana. Focusing on the last years of Dr. Rodney's life, this enthralling documentary tells the story of a man who dedicated and ultimately gave his life to the struggle for equal rights and justice.



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ABOUT THE G20

The G20 is a self-appointed group of 19 wealthy nations and the European Union that brings together heads of state, finance ministers and central bankers twice a year for closed-door discussions. While agreements reached among member states are non-binding, the G20 does serve as an elite mechanism for coordinating the global economy.

At the recent G20 summit in Toronto, European efforts to reach agreement on instituting a global bank tax and greater capital requirements on banks were either defeated or watered down by the United States. The G20 nations did commit to reducing their national budget deficits by half by 2013, though some economists worry that this could undermine economic growth and lead to a double-dip recession. How individual nations would reduce their deficits was left unstated, but it is likely this would mean deep cuts in social spending around the world.

The G20 next meets Nov. 11-12 in Seoul, South Korea.

—JOHN TARLETON

Over the weekend of June 26, and mostly on Sunday following the main protest, 1,090 people were arrested, the largest mass arrest in Canadian history: more than during the Clayoquot Sound protest in 1993; more than during the October Crisis in 1970. Some of the arrested were bystanders, some were couples on dinner dates, and some were hard-working activists and organizers. Women held at the detention center were threatened with gang rape. People passed out from deprivation of food and water for more than 24 hours.

Journalists were arrested for covering the

events. Street medics were jailed for administering aid. People were arrested for singing Kumbaya and the national anthem, “O Canada,” for wearing black, for possessing a bandana, for traveling in a group, for being a community activist and for being on public streets. As of this writing, arrests continue and some hearings are operating under a publication ban, barring the public and press from the proceedings. At least 17 people are charged with serious yet spurious offences, including conspiracy, possession of dangerous weapons, “mischief” and obstruction of justice. The reality is that they are being charged for publicly demonstrating their political opposition to the G20.

The corporate media reported that anarchists and communists rampaged through the streets, violently smashing shop windows and terrifying innocent passersby. Only in a commodity-obsessed society does an inanimate object such as a bank window or a police car have “violence” committed against it.

“Violent” would be what happened to John Pruyne, a Niagara-area resident who came to Toronto with his family to peacefully protest the G20. He was sitting in Queen’s Park, the official “free speech zone,” when riot police ordered him to move. Due to his prosthetic leg, Pruyne had trouble hoisting himself off the grass, which was when the police began kicking and beating him. Pruyne says one cop knelt on his head as others yanked at his arms. His prosthetic leg was wrenched from his body and tossed aside, while he was carted off to the detention center. Left in a cage for 27 hours, he was finally released without charges, and without his money, walking sticks and eyeglasses.

Fences are emblematic of our era, in place to secure boundaries from Palestine to the U.S. border. In every instance, in every pattern of wire, in every block of concrete we see the power of the State loom over disempowered citizens. The fence erected for the G20 was no different: locking in wealth and power and blocking out the general population, the fence reminds us what classes look like; it forces us to consider which side we are on. Fences are the joints in our movements, the catalysts around which we can begin to organize and resist.

— ELISE THORBURN

The summit ended June 27 with hundreds more arrested in violent roundups, “kettlings,” and raids on university student centers and the Convergence space. On Sunday the police fired rubber bullets and sprayed tear gas at demonstrators.

Following the summit, solidarity demonstrations have taken place in Toronto regularly, as well as across Canada from Halifax to Vancouver and Winnipeg to Montreal. Still, polls put public support for the police around 68 percent. On July 7, the 36 members of the Toronto City Council in session voted unanimously to commend the police force on their actions during the G20 summit.

Why did we gather on the streets of Toronto? Why did we march, chant slogans, smash windows and burn police cars? Because of the abuses of power that filter down from the G20 to the Toronto municipal government. Because of the sham of democracy used to shield the public from the truth. Because the G20’s policies serve only the interests of those

inside the barricades erected to protect capital. Because the elite will use this force again and again to fend off protests, punish resistance and enforce their policies. Because this violence happens every day in communities of color. Because this violence is not new in the countries from which the G20 nations extract their wealth: the G-others.

We gathered on the streets of Toronto, and we continue to gather here and everywhere because we are ready, because we refuse to be afraid, because we demand to be heard, because together we are strong and because we fight to win.

At least \$250,000 is needed to cover the defense of those with remaining serious charges. To donate, visit g20.torontomobilize.org.

Elise Thorburn is a scholar and activist based in Toronto.



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MON AUG 2, 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED

PRESENTATION: “DOCUMENT YOUR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS.” Daniel Tucker offers examples of large-scale artistic documentary projects undertaken to understand contemporary social movements, including AREA Chicago (a publication and event series), Town Hall Meetings (a group interview system), and Farm Together Now (thematic interviews with activist-farmers). Visit miscprojects.com for more information.

TUE AUG 3, 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED

PRESENTATION: RACIAL ORDER AND ARIZONA SB 1070. Join Joel Olson of the Repeal Coalition for a discussion about struggles over white identity, contemporary populist actions by state powers to impose racial order, and obviating both nativist and reformist views through international grassroots movements. Olson is the author of *The Abolition of White Democracy* and teaches political theory at Northern Arizona University.

WED AUG 4, 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED

SCREENING: CHILD BRIDES: STOLEN LIVES. Global Goods Partners' documentary *Child Brides: Stolen Lives* (2007, 60 min.) looks at early child marriage around the world and the economic incentives for it.

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Ideas Are Our Weapons

BY ARUN GUPTA

Ideas don't just die. They have to be challenged with other ideas, and the forces sustaining them must be defeated.

Take neoliberalism, ushered in by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher 30 years ago. Neoliberalism promotes privatization, deregulation, trade and capital liberalization and the ideology of personal responsibility. These are just the means, however. The goal has always been to reverse New Deal-style redistribution by reconstituting upper-class power and wealth.

This is a simple fact. In the late 1970s, notes former Labor Secretary Robert Reich, the top 1 percent of the U.S. population raked in 8 to 9 percent of the annual income. By 2007 the share was 23.5 percent, on par with the 23.9 percent take by the gilded elite in 1928, on the cusp of the Great Depression.

The New Depression that began in 2008 is said to have discredited neoliberalism. (It's not a recession when dizzying unemployment levels, new spending cuts and public sector layoffs mean the economy is poised to shrink again.) The bailout of the banks violated every neoliberal tenet: Government was there to plunk down trillions of dollars to keep the roulette wheel spinning, returning Wall Street to obscene profiteering in a year. The end goal was what mattered: making the public pay for the follies of the wealthy.

THE IMF COMES HOME TO ROOST

So neoliberalism may be discredited, but that's irrelevant. In July the IMF issued its first-ever review of the U.S. financial sector, recommending the same poison that has sickened developing countries for decades. It called for the United States to reduce the nation's debt to 70 percent of the GDP by 2015

by increasing gas taxes, eliminating the interest deduction on home mortgages, cutting Social Security, possibly instituting a national consumption tax and non-military "expenditure reductions."

This is classic neoliberalism: lavish funds on state violence from Afghanistan to the recent G20 Summit in Toronto, but cut social services and squeeze more blood from the public. The IMF prescription would cripple the U.S. economy, as it is doing in Greece and Ireland. As government spending is cut and taxes increase, jobs disappear, consumer spending declines, tax revenues plummet, completing the vicious cycle with further job losses.

The IMF plan segues with the elite agenda of raiding Social Security to make the public pay once more for debt incurred by wars and bailouts. This is the purpose of Obama's Debt Commission, which is stacked with Social Security looters. Targeting social welfare also deflects attention from taxing the wealthy or regulating the finance sector strictly.

REJOINING THE BATTLE

Given the looming Republican tide in November, the Obama administration will likely be limited to more reverse Robin Hood policies and more military escapades in the Middle East, Asia and Latin America, such as the recent dispatch of 46 U.S. warships and 7,000 Marines to Costa Rica.

Neoliberalism will march on unless it is defeated by better ideas. The right's success over the last 50 years owes much to its war of ideas. It repackaged an old doctrine, the unregulated free market, as the source of freedom and guarantor of democracy.

While the left needs to rejoin the battle of ideas, too many movements are mired in self-destructive postmodernism

that rejects grand narratives, celebrates victimhood and resistance, distrusts any sort of power, obsesses over the micro and the personal, and exalts identity as the source of political knowledge and authenticity.

For instance, during protests against the G20 in Toronto, chaotic mass protests were subdued easily by violent policing. The marginally organized Black Bloc allowed the police to employ provocateurs, many of whom were caught on camera. Well-organized non-violent direct action might have been more effective instead of the theater of repression and resistance, in which we play assigned roles with little hope of changing the script. And in the final act, we are victims of the police state.

It is mainly through resistance or victimhood where people become worthy subjects for the left, but these frames tend to exclude agency, particularly our ability to act in a positive capacity.

VICTIMS OR AGENTS?

In the Gulf of Mexico crisis, commercial fishermen are cast as victims. Certainly they have been injured by both BP and the government, but victimization implicitly validates a "way of life" synonymous with industrial capitalism. Is it a victory to restore a fossil-fueled industry responsible for ecological destruction through pollution, overharvesting and bycatch?

As victims the fishermen become our allies. But until they are victims they are not worthy subjects because — take your pick — they are white or middle class or conservative or heterosexual.

Seeing them as political agents, however, means confronting how their needs conflict with our politics. This is why many progressives shun difficult political issues regarding the state, organization, work and agency. It's easier to fantasize about retreating to post-apocalyptic spaces where we can create our post-capitalist utopias.

This was evident in the selection of Detroit for the U.S. Social Forum. While I skipped Detroit, one activist who hails from Detroit and is close to the organizing committee for the Social Forum provided insight into the possibilities and limits of some key left tendencies.

He mentioned the nearly 900 urban farms and gardens in Detroit allow residents to buy fresh vegetables in a city without one grocery store. More than that, he said the farming movement was "revolutionary." He explained that today's youth, "having never known a world without instant messaging or texting" expect instant gratification. The slow, hard work it takes to grow food teaches the kids a different temporal experience crucial to organizing.

True. But can we build a movement out of farming in post-industrial blight? In many ways it's just "Utopian Separatism." The historical geography of America is littered with such attempts from Christian movements to communities of runaway slaves to back-to-the-land communes.

The problem with the micro is the state and capital will try to co-opt activists' success. In Detroit, wealthy money manager John Hantz says he is going to invest \$30 million to buy 5,000 acres in the city to create the world's largest urban farm. Along with capital, he needs the state to change zoning, property tax and environmental laws. Yet his plans to build a huge commercial farm growing biofuels is hardly what Detroit needs, and some critics suggest Hantz is grabbing the land to build ritzy condos and shopping centers.

This shows how the ground under us will be reorganized by the state and capital unless we confront them politically. The failure of revolutionary movements to fundamentally alter the nature of the state hangs over our heads. It's why many activists shun organization beyond the voluntary or hyper-local, and idealize community organizing. Left to its own devices, community organizing will work for needed reforms — improved schools, more public space, some more social welfare — but leave the state untouched.

This is the lesson of trade unionism, which fights for better pay and workplace conditions rather than challenging the nature of work and production. Though we can't just recreate old models. In developed economies there are no longer legions of industrial workers looking to the revolutionary vanguard party for leadership.

Few on the left still cling to the orthodoxy of the worker as the sole agent of revolution. But expanding agency to the community means rejecting the empty slogan of "intentional community." Today's successful movements that resist and create are geographically rooted, whether it's in Latin America, the rural insurgencies in the Southeast Asia or Detroit.

We still need visionary leadership and organization. But one that confronts the paradox of democracy — it's about conflict, not just consensus — and is accountable to the base, while being able to concentrate power and resources in the fight against capital.

These limits hamstring the global justice movement. A decade ago, tens of thousands of people would take to the streets to disrupt elite summits. It created a sense of power, but no idea of what to do because the methods were "horizontalist" and anarchic. The creative projects were radical spaces and puppet-making, vegan kitchens and critical masses, all of which prize the mobocracy as the organizational form because it allows the individual maximum freedom, a sort of neoliberal anarchism.

We can't lapse into defeatist ideas like everything is subjective or nothing can change until everything is changed, or put our faith in false prophets like Obama. We need to say what we are for — liberation, the redistribution of resources and collective control of our work and living spaces — while being open to other people's experiences, desires and ideas.

It is the ideas that will spark a new movement, one that can win the world.





Michigan Central Station. PHOTO: YVES MARCHAND.

Detroit Disassembled

IN THIS ESSAY:

The Ruins of Detroit

BY YVES MARCHAND AND

ROMAIN MEFFRE STEIDLVILLE 2010

Detroit Disassembled

BY ANDREW MOORE

DAMIANI/AKRON ART MUSEUM

Sword of My Mouth

BY JIM MUNROE (STORY)

AND SHANNON GERARD (ART)

IDW, 2010

Detroit is a place that demands experience, not observation.

The powerful forces that converged there — the state, industry, and unions; of capital and labor — give it near-mythical status in the American imagination. Today the boarded-up storefronts and trees sprouting from crumbling factory floors are what remain of that clash.

I went there recently for the U.S. Social Forum. Arriving before dawn, I rode past impenetrable complexes surrounded by wire and lights, coming off those glorious smooth interstates onto pitted pavement whose lane-stripes have long faded away.

Such profound dilapidation appears in sharp focus in *The Ruins of Detroit*, by Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre: the molting ceiling of an opera house, or a former mansion surrounded by vacant lots, its red stone façade drooping like the face of a Bassett hound. It's the pair's first book together, but their collaboration began nine years ago, photographing abandoned buildings around Paris. Marchand and Meffre told me they photograph ruins in part as a way to preserve history, and in part because, as any kid will tell you, it's exciting to break into old buildings. There's a romanticism to their work — evident in the saturated jewel tones, peeling layers, unexpected views and angles. Mystical and intoxicating, these scenes look as if the person in that room had only just stepped out — and in their absence, the roof caved in. Chairs lie overturned on

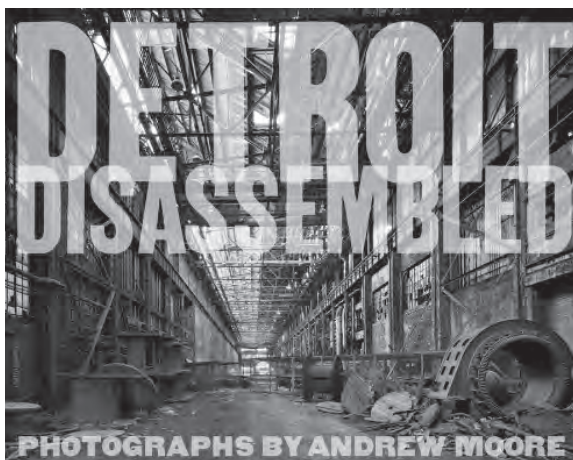
the floor as light streams in through weather-made skylights over the exquisite-looking detritus scattered below. The accompanying text, in contrast, presents a straightforward, even clinical, analysis without the elegiac tone Americans often adopt when conjuring the ghosts of industries past.

Andrew Moore's *Detroit Disassembled* takes a gentler approach. Moore, best known for his large-format portrayals of the architecture of Cuba and the former USSR, also betrays a fondness for decayed grandeur. His deftly curated work shows us not just abandonment, but what happens afterward. One photo shows a factory floor covered with a carpet of green mold. Another shows birch saplings growing on what was once a library. We also see people — on street corners and in the doorways of these supposedly abandoned houses. Where Marchand and Meffre freeze-frame at a specific state of decay, Moore pushes onward.

Several buildings appear in both works, like the Packard Motors plant. Unused since 1958, it's a long, quiet rectangle covered with orderly windows. Midway, the roof and frame cascade down to the second floor like a toppled stack of papers. In the 1990s the site, expansive and unattended, was a favored party spot; now it's slated for demolition, like many of the buildings here, and tour buses stop by on occasion.

Ruins are incredibly seductive, and both books are visually stunning. Their grandiosity is so out of scale with any experience you could have in Detroit today that the photos feels like abstractions.

continued on page 14



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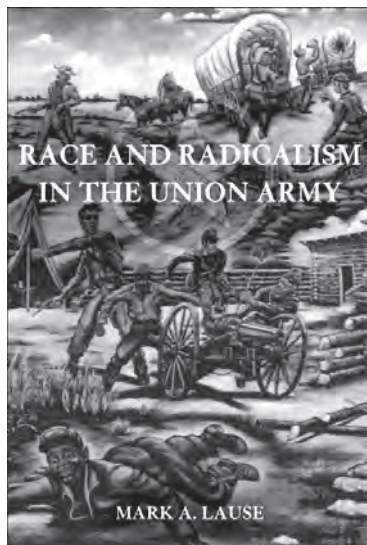
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A 'Lost Cause' Worth Reviving

Race and Radicalism in the Union Army

MARK A. LAUSE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 2009

In the decades following the U.S. Civil War there was a rash of monument building. Plaques were sunk into ground still littered with shards of weaponry and human beings. Powerful officers and men who shared their names with towns were plunked down in granite. The sites of famous battles were plugged into a spatial constellation of officially sanctioned memory.

Along with these monuments, a narrative was constructed that glorified the honor of the battlefield and suggested that both sides could claim it in equal measure — the rest, details. Frederick Douglass in particular recognized that this ideology recast the Civil War as primarily a sectional rather than social conflict, and argued that equal opportunity monument building obscured the fundamental issue of the war: slavery.

But not every aspect of the war was so easily absorbed by the narrative of sectional conflict, and not every battlefield was commemorated. Honey Springs Depot in what was then Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) was the site of the region's most significant battle, but the Union Army veterans who fought there with the District of the Frontier showed no interest in erecting a monument.

This historical silence is at the heart of Mark Lause's *Race and Radicalism in the Union Army*. The District of the Frontier was a tri-racial army drawn primarily from the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek and Seminole nations, along with many escaped slaves and free black volunteers, and led by a handful of radical abolitionists, land-reform militants and socialists. Some of the officers (most of whom were white) were close associates of John Brown and rode with him in Kansas, skirmishing with pro-slavery forces prior to the war.

Two Brainiac Oddballs and One Mean Bastard

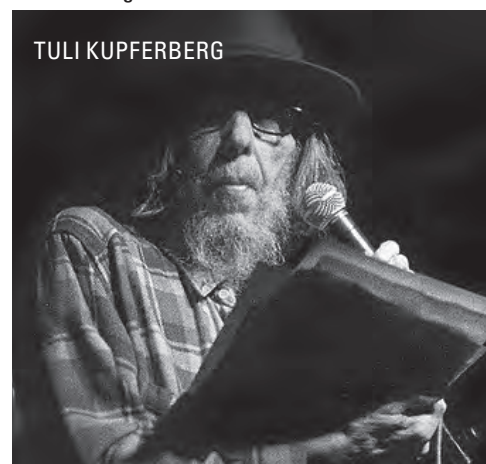
BY STEVEN WISHNIA

I first wished George Steinbrenner dead around 1998, during the American League playoffs.

The Yankees owner would have been collateral damage. He was sharing his box seats with Rupert Murdoch and Rudolph Giuliani. If lightning struck, I mused; if David Cone slipped and unleashed a 98-mph triple beanball; or if a beam from the Yankee Stadium ceiling caved in on their heads, I would start believing in God.

I'm still an atheist.

Steinbrenner's actual demise came July 13, the day after the deaths of ex-Fugs singer Tuli Kupferberg and graphic novel writer Harvey Pekar. Both were unique personae in the grand tradition of brainiac Jewish oddballs, and probably far better human beings.



TULI KUPFERBERG

Kupferberg, who was 86, cofounded the Fugs in 1965 with Midwestern refugee Ed Sanders. They and the Velvet Underground were the most important bands to bubble out of the ferment of the Lower East Side in the 1960s, although their sensibilities were markedly different — leftist/macho/marijuana/Allen Ginsberg vs. apolitical/bisexual/heroin/Andy Warhol. The Fugs fused Beat poetics with garage-band rock 'n' roll, throwing in locker-room jokes (a country tune about using Saran Wrap for condoms), ecstatic sexual evangelism ("Frenzy," "Group Grope"), occasional bits of melodic beauty, and grossly explicit antiwar satire ("War Song," "Kill for Peace"). Their most emblematic lyric, Kupferberg said in 1997, was "I ain't ever gonna go to Vietnam/ I prefer to stay here and screw your mom." (Others prefer "Monday, nothing/ Tuesday, nothing," delivered in a quasi-cantorial drone.)

It says something about the music scene of the late '60s that both the Fugs and David Peel landed major-label contracts. Their Warner/Reprise debut included a track entitled "Exorcising the Evil Spirits From the Pentagon" — recorded live at an antiwar demonstration there in 1967, chanting "OUT, DEMONS, OUT!"

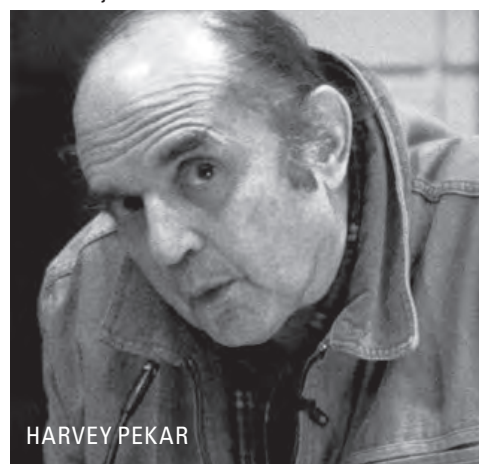
After the Fugs broke up (they re-formed in the '80s), Kupferberg remained a figure on the Lower

East Side scene, drawing cartoons and penning multitudinous song parodies.

"Our goal was to make the revolution," he told the Perfect Sound Forever website in 1997. "The Fugs were about dope and fucking and any kind of mind liberation that didn't kill you or damage your internal organs." On the other hand, he said, one reason they failed "to get from our good ideas to the society we wanted" was that "it was basically a youth movement and basically a middle-class, male movement. That's not enough."

"Tuli was a great poet, and his 'Morning, Morning' reduces me to tears," says pioneering underground cartoonist Trina Robbins.

Harvey Pekar, who was 70, lived most of his life in obscurity in Cleveland, but he made art out of it. He parlayed his days taking the morning bus to a file-clerk job at the Veterans Administration into a



HARVEY PEKAR

series of comics called *American Splendor*, drawn by a cast of cartoonists that included R. Crumb, Alison Bechdel, Gary Dumm and Joe Sacco.

Pekar had known Crumb since the early '60s, when they were both bohemian jazz fans growing up in Cleveland. When Pekar conceived his own stories in the '70s, Crumb offered to illustrate them.

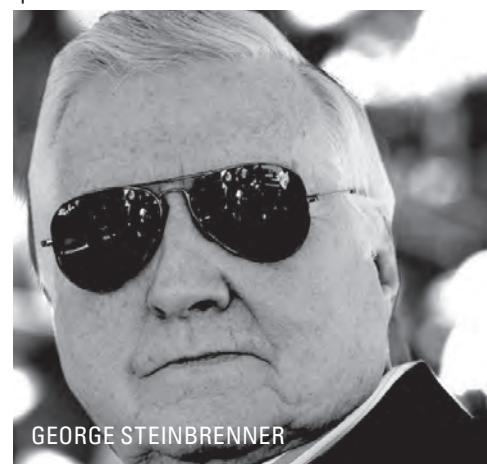
He told the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* in 1994 that his comics were about "the 99 percent of life that nobody ever writes about." They depicted his days of shelving file folders and conversations with bus drivers; his years of chemotherapy and worrying about being able to buy a house without being corrupted by property ownership, and jazz organist Charles Earland announcing that critics didn't understand "this music is about love." When he married Joyce Brabner in 1983, the next issue of *American Splendor* was subtitled "Harvey's Latest Crapshoot: His Third Marriage to a Sweetie from Delaware and How His Substandard Dishwashing Strains Their Relationship."

A nervous, no-nonsense wiseass with a strong urban-Jewish accent, Pekar didn't play the success game. He was a regular guest on NBC's *Late Show with David Letterman* — until 1987, when he wore an "On Strike Against NBC" T-shirt on

the show and denounced the corporate crimes of GE, NBC's owner.

As for Steinbrenner? No New York baseball fan couldn't be thrilled by the dramatic way the Yankees of '77 and '78 beat out the Red Sox, Royals, and Dodgers, or by the Jeter-Williams-Posada-Rivera team that won the World Series four times in five years. But the Boss's managerial politics made it hard for anyone with a conscience to root for the Yankees. In 1974, he pleaded guilty to felony conspiracy charges for making illegal contributions to Richard Nixon's 1972 presidential campaign. After the 2000 election, he gave George W. Bush \$5,000 to help him steal Florida.

Steinbrenner epitomized the Ayn Rand arrogant capitalist. He never swung a bat or threw a ball at anything close to a professional level, but he was quick to claim credit for the Yankees' victories and



GEORGE STEINBRENNER

to insult players publicly when they lost, in terms like "fat toad," "he spit the bit," and "Mr. May." Like every other baseball owner, he found ignoring steroids highly profitable.

As a boss, he was the kind of domineering, rule-by-fear bully for whom the epithet "prick" was created. He'd curse out parking-lot attendants and berate pretzel vendors. He was once barred from baseball for hiring a gambler to dig up dirt on outfielder Dave Winfield, and he suspended Don Mattingly for refusing to shave his mustache. Mattingly was a grown man, well into his thirties, and so dedicated to the game that Yankees fans dubbed him "Donnie Baseball."

The evil he did lives on beyond the field. He tore down Yankee Stadium, the Sistine Chapel of baseball, because it lacked corporate luxury suites. Although the Yankees are the richest franchise in baseball, and the fourth richest in world sports, he extracted around a billion dollars worth of "infrastructure improvements" from the city and state for the new ballpark. So while New York is amputating subway and bus service, closing senior centers, and laying off school nurses, the public is still paying for a stadium where front-row ticket prices for a single have been slashed to a mere \$1,500 — from \$2,625 last year.

Lause argues the existence of such an army points to an understanding of the Civil War as a revolutionary period in which white supremacy, colonial expansion and class oppression were challenged by the oppressed themselves and their radical allies. Multiple struggles for emancipation, self-determination, and sundry visions of "free labor," radical land reform and even socialism came together uneasily under the auspices of the Union Army in a way that "required the people themselves

to mount the stage of history, write their own dialogue and direct their own actions."

In this concise but engrossing book, Lause counters the "dewy-eyed romance of 'the Lost Cause.'" He explains that the mid-19th century United States was beset by two related problems: "clashes among ... [ruling class] authorities reflected an unprecedented crisis in the coherence of the ruling elites and their institutions" at the same time that a particular "ide-

ology of American republicanism had introduced a usually minor factor in such considerations: the aspirations of ordinary people unwilling to accept the status quo." For Lause, these aspirations found partial but powerful expression in District of the Frontier soldiers such as William Addison Phillips.

Arriving in Antebellum Kansas as a passionate abolitionist and land reform advocate, Phillips was drawn into John Brown's circle. Later as a colonel in the army of

Gen. James A. Blunt, Phillips won large numbers of Confederate soldiers — both conscripted Indians and poor whites — away from the secessionist cause and into the Union Army. He also scorned the corruption that mired Blunt, a once-militant abolitionist who as an Union general facilitated property theft and livestock rustling from Indian nations for the benefit of a local supply company owner by the name of Alexander McDonald. Phillips ordered the Indian

Detroit

Continued from page 13

Jim Munroe's graphic novel *Sword of My Mouth* imagines a bleak future: the Rapture has happened, and we see the not-so-chosen of Detroit try to make lives amid the remains of society. In this world, angels roam the skies, the interstates are off-limits and magic works. Its harsh environment contrasts with Shannon Gerard's line drawings that give a warm feeling to the narrative and draw the reader in to what becomes a story of human relationship, focused on one group of urban farmers.

Sword of My Mouth looks at the world through the lens of fantasy, but it feels familiar. Characters garden vacant lots to feed themselves and sell the rest at Eastern Market; kids band together and look out for each other; single moms raise children with the help of friends and relatives.

None of these books adequately convey what it's like to be in Detroit now, with its far-flung concrete, scatterings of people and vast, vacant spaces. Munroe comes close, but errs on the side of optimism.

It's impossible to ascribe a single narrative to the city. But it may be a useful way to think, as did many of us at the USSF, of what we'd do if all the structures of the government fell away — as in Detroit, most already have.

The numbers are dire: nearly 30 percent unemployment; 66,000 vacant lots, a 24 percent rental vacancy rate. The news depicts a ghost town, irrelevant since the late '60s — an image that art projects tend to reinforce, but that be-

lies the facts on the ground. Native Detroiters, by and large, aren't concerned with making themselves a place on the world cultural map, but with making do.

One lane of every road goes to parking and bicyclists, so generous is the asphalt in this city. The city holds nearly 900 farms and gardens, many of which now edu-

here, mostly decoupled from the government, contradicts our notions of what "urban decay" looks like, just as much as it challenges what we think a progressive movement should look like. "Back to the land" wouldn't have been my first thought. This looks much more like a new world in the shell of the old than like the triumph of the proletariat.

In some ways, you can see 1980s New York inside today's Detroit — the white flight, crime, vacant land and decrepit buildings are all here, albeit at much higher levels. Even the art scene hasn't bypassed Detroit. Two decades ago, the local artist Tyree Guyton started converting abandoned houses on Heidelberg Street into art installations, and now the Heidelberg Project is a nonprofit organization with international renown. More recently, street artist Banksy drew a young boy on a solitary wall there — "I remember when this was trees," it read. The piece was promptly cut out of its wall and moved to a gallery.

Grace Lee Boggs, who celebrated her 95th birthday at the Social Forum, has lived and worked in Detroit for over five decades, and garners tremendous respect from the youth she works with and from activists nationwide. It's an inspiration to be reminded that there have always been people concerned with building for the future — yet a cursory glance over Detroit's scarred surface reveals no obvious social progress. Though gatherings like the USSF may show us what could be, we have yet to realize change. The left here resembles the city itself — a space waiting to be claimed.

—IRINA IVANOVA

cate and train aspiring gardeners. Smallville Farms, which I visited, is built on two city lots and, under the supervision of a full-time manager, employs the volunteer services of gardeners from around the city, an architect, and the kids on the block. A vacant house nearby serves as a storage shed. Apart from gardening equipment inside, there was little of value in the house. The metal had long been scavenged for sale, as happens to most abandoned buildings here.

The rich social ecosystem

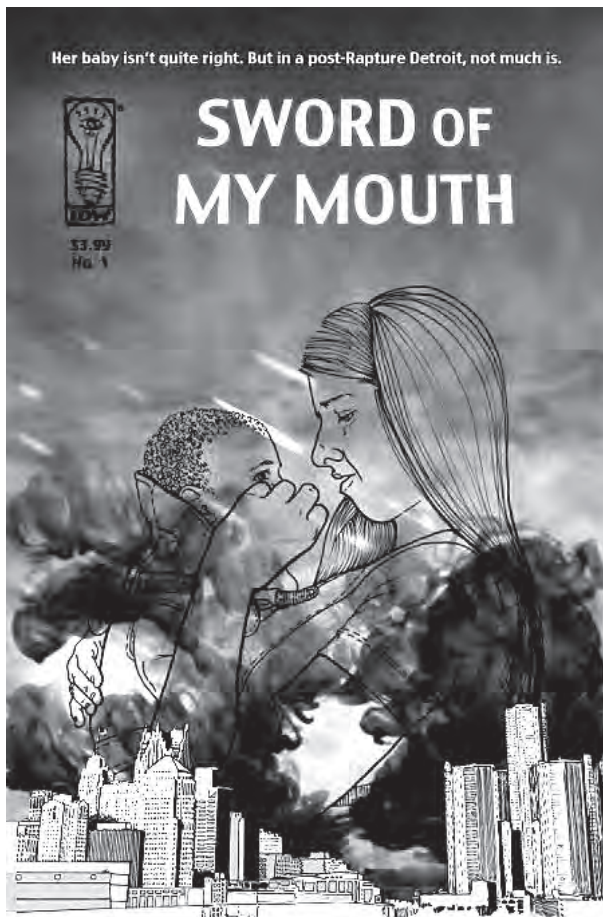
works with and from activists nationwide. It's an inspiration to be reminded that there have always been people concerned with building for the future — yet a cursory glance over Detroit's scarred surface reveals no obvious social progress. Though gatherings like the USSF may show us what could be, we have yet to realize change. The left here resembles the city itself — a space waiting to be claimed.

structured historical memory."

Perhaps their vision for a more egalitarian society — in which white supremacy and colonialism are dismantled and our aim becomes the total emancipation of all labor — is a "Lost Cause" of the Civil War that is worth remembering. And perhaps we should insist that it will rise again.

—SCOTT BORCHERT

A version of this review originally ran at MR Zine.

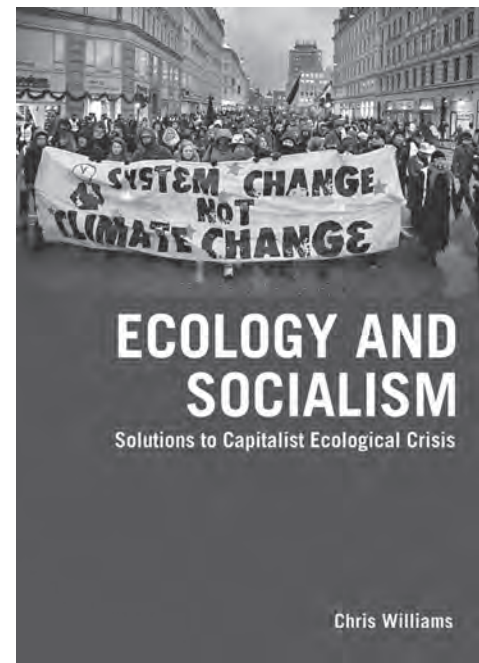


Law: A Search for the Missing Wealth of the Working Poor.

It is Phillips — and the countless Indian and black Union veterans who faced a different sort of struggle — who best represent the revolutionary potential of the Civil War. It's not hard to conclude, with Lause, that the uncommemorated battlefield they left was "a reflexive act of protest" on the part of "John Brown's body of followers and the veterans they led," a sign of their refusal to "collaborate in creating yet another park for officially con-

Home Guards under his command to practice self defense against rustlers. They did, and "blandly he informed his astonished superiors that under his orders Indians in army uniform had shot and killed white government contractors or subcontractors."

After the war Phillips was elected to congress as a Radical Republican. He served as a legal advisor to the Cherokee nation and even married into it after the death of his first wife; with his second wife he co-authored *Labor, Land, and*



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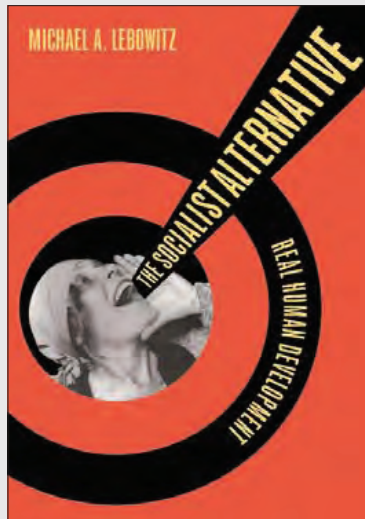
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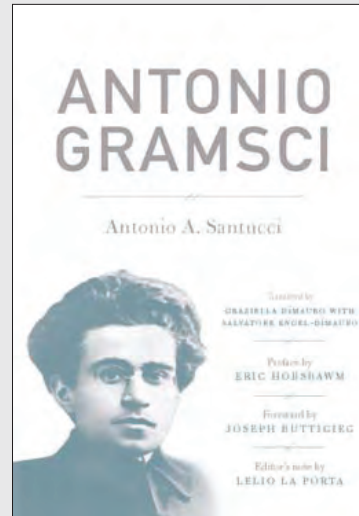
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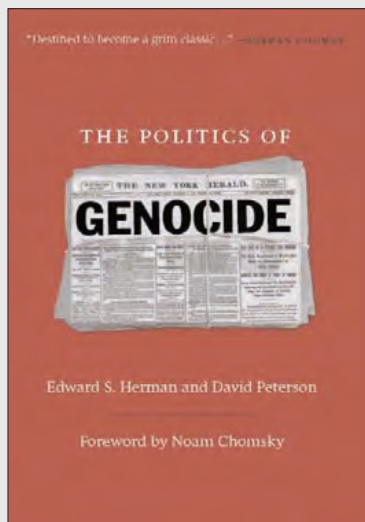
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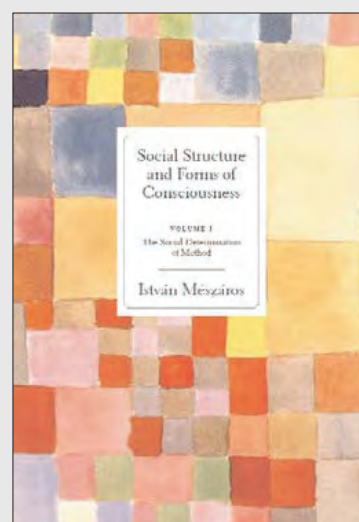


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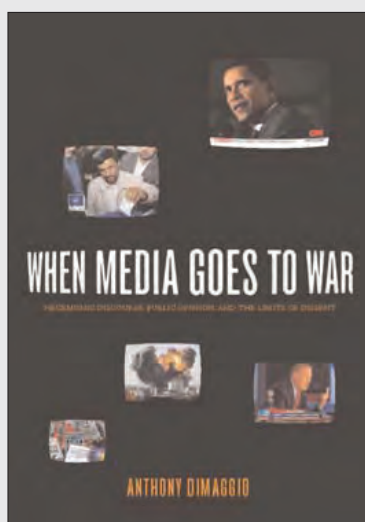
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